

This project is being initiated by historians – methodologists and historians specializing in recent history, who simultaneously have a lot of experience with oral accounts within the framework of oral history. In recent years, we have observed the following paradox: the rapid success of “oral history” in Poland and post-totalitarian countries (in Europe and Latin America) (von Plato 2012), measured by the rapidly increasing amount of archivization and exhibition projects, the amount of people and the public funding involved in such projects, as well as the widespread reach of the opinion within society about the high cognitive and ethical value of personal stories about the past have not led to a similarly spectacular success of oral sources within the framework of academic historiography.

“Oral Sources Re-inspected” has the following objectives:

1. A comprehensive critical examination of the possibilities of using oral sources (accounts) in research into contemporary history, taking into consideration the specificity and state of Polish historiography in a comparative approach with select Central European historiography (with their own particular experiences, while simultaneously culturally and historically similar in their development and the connected problems), as well as in reference to Anglo-Saxon historiography, which is considered to be the standard in these regards;

The evaluation of the potential oral sources possess for expanding the scope of research into contemporary history. Selecting areas in which the usage of oral accounts is especially justified.

2. Preparing methods of proceeding with elicited sources, corresponding to the cognitive objectives of contemporary historiography. The formulation of a set of instruments, which would become part of the method used by historians specializing in contemporary history.

The detailed research objectives along this path will be as follows:

- a. The preparation of standards and procedures for eliciting historical sources on the basis of the knowledge and experience gathered on the subject thus far and the current achievements in the field of cognitive neuroscience, the psychology of memory, and linguistics in cooperation with specialists in these fields.
- b. Determining the procedures and tools for the criticism and analysis of oral sources for the requirements of history, using the theories and methods of qualitative data analysis from other fields of science, including computer technologies.

In order to achieve the project objectives presented above, a research group will be created consisting of a permanent team of two historians with knowledge and experience pertaining to the methodology of history, the history of historiography, oral history and studies into contemporary history, and also collaborators – a historian from the Czech Academy of Sciences and specialists in the fields of natural and social sciences: a cognitive neuroscientist, a psychologist with a focus on the psychology of memory, a linguist and a qualitative data analyst. The research tasks will be executed both through consultations/exchange of knowledge and through group methodological work with empirical material.

The research program will have a potentially vitalizing effect for methodology of history and contemporary history both in Poland and worldwide. Besides project thematic range issue and significance of its findings for source studies, it introduces new perspective, provocative to well-established humanistic studies as well as the model of research of the same kind.